

GUEST VIEW

Creek commitment lacking

Removal of the Parrot Tailings behind the Civic Center as ordered by Governor Bullock continues. But Superfund deadlines loom as we wait for a real commitment from the Consent Decree (CD) parties — EPA, ARCO, the state and Butte Silver Bow — for a future restored Silver Bow Creek in the center of Butte.



**NORTHEY
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Butte Priority Soils Superfund decisions are rapidly approaching. This area includes the Silver Bow

Creek corridor from Texas Avenue behind the Civic Center to the confluence with Blacktail Creek near Montana Street. This Creek near Montana Street. This corridor suffered environmental neglect for a century and cleanup inactivity for the last two decades while creek and river remediation and restoration west of Butte was funded with hundreds of millions of dollars.

A year and a half ago, former EPA Regional Administrator Doug Benevento prodded the CD parties toward an “agreement in principle” for the remaining cleanup. On January 26, 2018 they emerged from behind the confidentiality veil with an agreement, which requires consent from all of the CD parties. What they do with the actual CD will determine what the center of Butte will be forever. This is extraordinarily important for the people of Butte, now and into the future.

The Restore Our Creek Coalition (ROCC) saw this day coming and over 4 years ago began mobilizing Butte folks to create a peoples’ vision for the cleanup and end land use for the Silver

Bow Creek corridor. ROCC’s consistent mission-statement has been:

- Remove the tailings (Parrot, Northside, Diggings East and Blacktail berm),

- Restore the creek,

- Create a Greenway and public amenities making the center of Butte a great community asset.

For decades Butte folks came to believe that no one really cared about their Superfund desires, but they responded en masse to expressing their voices through ROCC. Hundreds participated in ROCC’s visioning workshops, research subcommittees and the design efforts by investing their time, intellect, experience and desires. In October 2016, they produced the vision document “Silver Bow vision document “Silver Bow Creek Headwaters Park,” which included a restored Silver Bow Creek. Over 3500 folks eventually signed on to support ROCC’s vision and restoration of the creek.

Sixteen months after that, Butte citizens got a big victory when the CD parties committed, in the Agreement in Principle, to remove the remaining tailings from the Northside, Diggings East and Blacktail Berm. Then ARCO and Butte Silver Bow commissioned the design of park amenities in the area – the resulting plan closely replicating the previous vision effort of the people of Butte through ROCC. This was another win in achieving the ROCC/Butte vision.

But notwithstanding the CD parties’ commitments to removing the tailings and development of a park, the CD parties have not yet committed to the core objective of the ROCC Butte vision — restoring the creek.

For the last 15 months EPA leadership and the other CD

parties have repeatedly stated that the Agreement in Principle “would not preclude” a future creek restoration. Yet none of the documents committed them to creek restoration. Heck, there has yet to be a single document that even references a restored creek.

Although we appreciate encouraging statements from the CD parties, given Butte’s history, our community cannot just accept a rhetorical “trust us” when it comes to the future restoration of Silver Bow Creek.

Last November, ROCC asked the CD parties to “back up” their statements with proof in the form of a minimally costed conceptual design showing that a future restored creek from Texas Avenue to Blacktail Creek Texas Avenue to Blacktail Creek could be done. Regrettably, it took almost 5 months for the CD parties to respond — a response that did not even use the word “creek” and did not agree to the conceptual design.

ROCC immediately replied, telling the CD parties our community needs more than rhetoric, we need the proof that comes from the minimally-engineered conceptual design. Time is now running short for the commitment to a future restored creek to be made real and placed in the CD with support from all of the parties.

We remain skeptical but, because of good faith gains in the past (the tailings and park amenities), we are hopeful they will respond positively to the creek design request. Butte is watching for their response as if our future depends on it — because it does.

Northey Tretheway is the spokesperson for Restore Our Creek Coalition.